

SUNNY SOUTH ANALYSIS:

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT:

The primary recreation opportunities within the Sunny South project area are at developed recreation facilities: two reservoirs and an off-highway vehicle (OHV) trail system. There are also dispersed recreation opportunities, but to a lesser degree.

DEVELOPED RECREATION, RESERVOIR BASED:

Sugar Pine Reservoir and its developed recreation, as well as part of the Sugar Pine OHV trail system, are within the Sugar Pine Management Area, as identified in the Tahoe National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP). Sugar Pine reservoir is a domestic water supply for the community of Foresthill. Table 2 below contains information about resource management emphasis and management area concerns.

In 2015 the TNF resumed operation and maintenance of campgrounds and recreation areas such as boat ramps with the stated purpose of providing high quality recreation opportunities. Visitor retention – whether during a current visit or future visits – is an important factor in providing sustainable recreational opportunities and experiences.

Sugar Pine Reservoir covers approximately 160 acres. The reservoir and the recreation facilities were developed between 1979 and 1982. There are two family-use campgrounds, a group-use campground, a day use area between the two family campgrounds, and a boat ramp. Table 1 below summarizes capacity in terms of persons at one time (PAOT); a factor of 6 is given to each passenger vehicle parking space. Over the Memorial Day weekend, Saturday, May 28, 2016, all campgrounds, Manzanita day use, and the Sugar Pine boat ramp were 100 percent full, with people parking on NFSR 10 and walking in from the dam, and adjacent to the boat ramp.

Table 1, capacity for the Sugar Pine Recreation facilities

Name of facility (weeks of operation planned for 2016)	Persons at One Time (PAOT, factor of 6)	Notes
Giant Gap Campground (25)	210	5-double sites, 25 single sites
Shirrtail Creek Campground (19)	216	1-triple, 4-double, 25 single sites
Forbes Creek Group Campground (19)	100	
Manzanita Day Use (25)	234	39 passenger car spaces
Sugar Pine Boat Ramp (year round)	312-558	41 trailer spaces that could be occupied by 2 passenger vehicles per space, and 11 passenger car spaces
Total PAOT	1072 to 1318	

All three campgrounds are on a reservation system, and the family campgrounds have 9 first-come first-served sites each. For the summer of 2016 Forbes Creek group campground is reserved every weekend from Memorial Day to the end of September. This has been a common use pattern, as has full occupancy of both family campgrounds on the weekends. In 2015 and 2016, weekday occupancy at

Giant Gap and Shirttail Creek averages 30 to 40 percent. There is a paved, accessible, trail around 75 percent of the reservoir shoreline linking Giant Gap, Shirttail Creek, and Manzanita Day Use to the boat ramp. Swimming, fishing, and picnicking occurs around much of the reservoir with concentrated use near the parking lots for Manzanita and the boat ramp. Between Memorial Day and Labor Day weekends it is common for the 39-space parking lot to be over-full at Manzanita. The boat ramp has 11 passenger car spaces, all of which are full on the weekends, and often times during the week between Memorial Day and Labor Day weekends. While there are 41 trailer parking spaces at the boat ramp; it is unusual to see more than 10 of these occupied with boat trailers at any one time. In 2015 the gross revenue was in excess of \$141,000, making Sugar Pine the top income producer for the Tahoe National Forest; for many years it has been the second highest income producer.

Giant Gap, Shirttail Creek, and Manzanita Day Use are all accessed by one two lane National Forest System Road (NFSR): 4140-14, leading off of NFSR 4140 which intersects with (NFSR) 10, the Sugar Pine road. The Boat Ramp and Forbes Creek have small spur roads off of NFSR 10. Use of the Sugar Pine Reservoir day-use facilities alone often exceeds 550 people on the weekend. In summary, with all the facilities combined, it is not uncommon for the Sugar Pine area to receive use by as many as 1,000 people on one weekend day as they use the NFSR 10 to access the facilities. In casual conversation with day use visitors, many live within the Auburn-Colfax-Cool-Foresthill area, many of which return year after year, though new people also come to enjoy the area.

The developed recreation area is managed to provide a safe environment, optimal visitor satisfaction, and basic amenities. This has been accomplished, in part, through providing a landscape that most visitors find pleasing and relaxing. Generally speaking, visually, there is a homogeneity in appearance, which until recently, was a green backdrop of trees going down to the reservoir waters. Now there are dead and dying trees, orange in color or lacking needles which alters the visual experience. In terms of sound, with the exception of an occasional off-road vehicle or motorboat, the area is free of loud intrusive mechanical sounds which many recreationists find pleasing. Sensory wise, there is a clean forested environment and the kinds of smells a camper would normally find: a campfire, food cooking, and “pine-tree” scents.

Table 2: Tahoe Land and Resource Management Plan in terms of recreation.

LRMP Management Area	Resource Management Emphasis	Concerns for the Management Area
Sugar Pine (Management Area 96)	Recreation Management	Water quality and watershed conditions, dispersed camping which poses concerns for health and safety and resource protection, off-highway vehicle use.
Big (Management Area 97)	Recreation Management and Water Quality	Water quality, off-highway vehicle use, and dispersed camping.
Humbug Sailor Divide (Management Area 84)	Timber Management Visual Quality	Water quality for fisheries and domestic use as well as outdoor recreation including dispersed camping and the resource damage associated with it.

Big Reservoir and Morning Star campgrounds are in the Big management area. There is a conditional perpetual easement around the reservoir. Morning Star campground is, by decree, part of the easement

and operated much like private property although it is on National Forest System land. Big Reservoir campground is a National Forest System campground under special use permit and contains 20 family camping spaces. Big Reservoir and Morning Star campgrounds are accessed by NFSR 24 and are located about a mile beyond the Sugar Pine and Parker Flat OHV staging areas on NFSR 24.

DEVELOPED RECREATION, OFF-HIGHWAY VEHICLE STAGING AREAS AND TRAILS:

In 1982 the California Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Division funded the development of about 85 miles of designated (OHV) trails with 3 staging areas. The State of California continues to provide funding for this popular program through green sticker grants with funds from OHV registration fees.

Within the project area, in addition to the Sugar Pine and Big Management Areas, the OHV system trails are in the Humbug Sailor and Divide (MA 90) Management Areas. Identified Management Area issues and concerns in terms of recreation are identified in Table 2 above. There are two staging areas in the Sunny South Project Area: Sugar Pine and Parker Flat, both of which are located on NFSR 24, and accessed by NFSR 10. Portions of OHV trails known as loops 1, 1-7, 2, 3, 4, and 7 are within or immediately adjacent to project units; an estimated 3.5 miles of trail are expected to be impacted. These designated trails are managed to minimize resource impacts primarily through providing annual trail maintenance and optimal riding experiences on the trail. Common methods employed include shaping of the tread that provides erosion control, management of vegetation, and arrangement of fuels, boulders, or other natural, local, barriers. Some segments of trail are located on old road beds. There are also approximately 15 miles of NFSR maintenance level 2 roads within the project area that are available to, and popular with, OHVs including recreational utility vehicles.

DISPERSED RECREATION:

There are a number of dispersed uses in the project area including camping (usually associated with OHV use in this area), hiking, mining, bicycling, and recreational target shooting. Camping and recreational target shooting tend to occur near intersections of roads and trails, at the ends of roads, and at previous or current landings or project staging areas. Occasionally recreational users will open closed roads, landings, or skid trails. Common issues associated with dispersed recreation use are abandoned campfires, garbage, poor sanitation, off-route motorized use, and occasionally damage to other resources most commonly trees. The majority of dispersed use is in the Sugar Pine and Big Reservoir areas.

LAND USES:

There are active special use permits for non-exclusive use of public lands within the project area for property access, resource monitoring equipment, water systems, utilities, and weather stations. There is also an unused water system at a prior Forest Service facility within a project unit, SP27.

Sugar Pine road, NFSR 10, accesses year-round occupied residential private property in the Succor Flat area which is immediately adjacent to the project area north and west of Sugar Pine reservoir. Sugar Pine road also accesses the community of Iowa Hill. Most, if not all, of the Succor Flat area residents travel the Sugar Pine road since it is a higher standard, higher speed, 2-lane route than through the

community of Iowa Hill. For the Succor Flat area Foresthill is the nearest community with basic services such as fuel and groceries. Iowa Hill is nearly equidistant from Colfax and Foresthill.

Big Reservoir and OHV routes are accessed by NFSR 24. The large amount of traffic, from Succor Flat residents and visitors to Sugar Pine Reservoir, Big Reservoir area and OHV users, uses NFSR 10 to get to the Foresthill Divide Road.

Big Oak Flat contains a few year round residences by Mosquito Ridge Road (NFSR 96). Foresthill is the closest community with basic services such as fuel and groceries.

DIRECT AND INDIRECT EFFECTS:

Management requirements specifically developed for this project were designed to provide for visitor safety, to minimize impacts to the quality and availability of recreational experiences, to minimize disturbances and potential encounters during vegetation management operations, and to protect improvements and natural resources.

Implementation of the project will result in an increase in project-related traffic on the area roads which also provide access to campgrounds, staging areas, private property, and authorized special uses. Recreationists, OHV users, special use permittees, and private property owners may have encounters with large vehicles such as loaded log trucks at a higher frequency rate than has been typical in the past several years. This may discourage recreational use or cause unexpected inconveniences related to congestion, slow-moving vehicles, traffic, intimidation associated with meeting large vehicles and equipment on curvy mountain roads, noise and dust. Sounds associated with logging may reduce recreational and private property enjoyment. Some favorite dispersed use areas may not be available for a range of timeframes from a week to all season. Areas with active operations could be temporarily unavailable for public use. All of these would be direct, but short-term, impacts. Signage and announcements as to the location and duration of the vegetation management activities may allow recreationists to plan, and would mitigate some of the effects. The limited operation period management requirement is expected to mitigate a loss of sleep, a loss of enjoyment, and a loss of recreation experience that visitors expect to have at developed recreation facilities.

The project is not expected to close any for-fee recreation facility that would displace visitors and cause a loss of revenue used for reinvestment into the operation and maintenance of the campground. Efforts will be made to inform and educate visitors about the project: about how the vegetation treatments, to reduce the extent and risk of insect infestations, benefit forest health and resilience and provide a long-term benefit to all forest resources.

Roads and some trail segments would be used as access routes to treatment units resulting in short-term closures, detours, or traffic delays. Closures are planned for when trail use is expected to be lower. Trails specialists and Timber Sale Administrators have reviewed trails that may be used as temporary roads and skid trails. Use of OHV trails for project implementation will have a direct short-term impact when they are closed and unavailable until after the project is completed. The Sunny South project would decommission temporary routes following project implementation and re-establish the route in the same season, if conditions are right, in a way that improves drainage and re-establishes a tread that provides enhanced rider experience. Native, local barriers such as logs and rocks, would be installed to keep traffic on the trail until the vegetation regrows. These management requirements have been

successfully used on other projects to limit expansion of, or establishment of new, dispersed use sites and off-route motorized use. Management requirements provide for a direct and indirect long term benefit and opportunity through restoration for protection of resources and rider satisfaction.

While there are expected to be short-term direct and indirect effects to visitors, property owners, and special use permit holders, when all management requirements are applied, there are no expected long-term direct or indirect adverse impacts as a result of the proposed treatments. Instead, there are expected to be long-term benefits from the treatments as proposed. Treating units would reduce the safety hazard of having insect-infested dead and dying trees around recreational use areas. Because treating units would reduce wildfire intensities and rates of spread over the existing condition, it would allow a greater number of Forest visitors and residents more time to evacuate the Sugar Pine recreational areas in an emergency. In addition, it would result in a healthy, green, forested environment; an enjoyable place to recreate and live. The Sunny South project is expected to aid in the continuation of sustainable, multiple-use, recreation opportunities on NFS lands in a way that provides protection measures for all resources.

CUMULATIVE EFFECTS:

Past activities (developed site maintenance, vegetation management, road maintenance) and present activities (developed recreation maintenance) would not lead to adverse cumulative effects on recreation resources or safe access to recreation opportunities, private land, or special use permit uses. Reasonably foreseeable future actions are:

1. Sugar Pine OHV Reroute: approximately 5.5 miles of reroute construction and decommissioning is planned for calendar years 2016 and 2017. The project reroutes segments of existing trail to sustainable grades, incorporating rolling grade dips into the alignment to reduce erosion and maintenance frequency. The design would employ elements that provide rider satisfaction, enticing riders to stay on the designated trail tread and to return to our area for future outings.
2. Sugar Pine Dam Radial Gate Installation: Sugar Pine dam and reservoir, and part of the associated conveyance and utilities are located on NFS land. The Foresthill Public Utility District (PUD) holds a special use permit for the operation and maintenance of these facilities, but does not have any role in the recreation facilities management aside from an annual payment in lieu of special-use permit fees. The PUD proposes installing radial gates in the Sugar Pine Dam spillway to increase domestic water storage capacity, which may also facilitate future sales of water. As of the date of this report the Forest Service has not finalized a proposed action nor gone out for public scoping; the project is not expected to be implemented until 2018.

Overall Sunny South's proposed action would provide for public safety and is expected to lead to future enjoyment of recreational experiences.